

To whom does “the work of ministry” in Ephesians 4:11-12 belong?

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Abstract

The view that Ephesians 4:11-12 offers support to the concept of ‘every member ministry’ has recently been challenged. The KJV reading of this passage, which understands “the work of ministry” as belonging to church leaders and not church members, has been revived in various commentaries, journal articles, and even systematic theologies. In this article we survey the two major interpretations of these verses and critically discuss the exegetical, semantic, and theological issues which arise. In particular, it will be shown that the grammatical construction of the verses, as well as the context, support the notion that the ministry belongs not to the gifted individuals of verse 11, but to the saints of verse 12. Part of this task involves showing that the word “equip” better fits the context than “prepare” or “perfect”. Finally, it will be shown that this understanding is consistent with the general teaching of the New Testament. If Baptists are to maintain the principle of ‘The priesthood of all believers,’ and the related idea of ‘every member ministry,’ an accurate understanding of Ephesians 4:11-12 is paramount.